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SUBJECT: DAILY SUMMARY OF JAPANESE PRESS 05/09/06

INDEX:

- (1) Poll on Koizumi cabinet's performance
- (2) Prime Minister Koizumi giving serious consideration to paying
homage at Yasukuni Shrine on Aug. 15, the day of the anniversary
of the end of WWII; If he visits, relations with China and ROK
will surely go from bad to worse
- (3) Interview with US Consul General for Okinawa Thomas Reich on
effect of US force realignment on Okinawa: Number of US Marines
unclear; Six bases will be returned in stages
- (4) ASDF realignment plan; Air Defense Command's Headquarters to
be strengthened; Control over MD system; 24-hour-a-day watch
- (5) Kakushin (Heart of matter) column by Yasuhiro Tase: Since
Japan appears to have forgotten its diplomatic strategy toward
neighboring nations, how then will it live in Asia?
- (6) In voting conducted by civic group on Constitution, many
youths in Shibuya support Article 9
- (7) Strategic distribution of ODA funds; Overseas Economic
Cooperation Council holds first meeting; Consideration also to be
given to environment area

ARTICLES:

- (1) Poll on Koizumi cabinet's performance

Questions & Answers
(Figures shown in percentage.)

Q: Prime Minister Koizumi has been in office for nearly five years. What's your overall rating for the performance of Prime Minister Koizumi and his cabinet over the past five years?

Appreciate very much	17.3
Appreciate somewhat	53.1
Don't appreciate very much	18.4
Don't appreciate at all	9.4
No answer (N/A)	1.8

Q: What do you think the Koizumi cabinet has accomplished in particular over the past five years? Pick as many as you like from among those listed below.

Postal privatization	44.3
Highway privatization	25.0
North Korea problem	24.8
Bad-loan write-off	15.5
Economic, employment measures	15.3
Decentralization	7.4
Deregulation	8.4
Fiscal reconstruction	5.9
Iraq problem	5.9
Food safety	4.1
Tax reform	2.9
Social security reform	2.0

TOKYO 00002500 002 OF 013

Emergency legislation, crisis management	1.9
US military base issues	1.9
Educational reform	1.8
Public security, crime prevention	1.5
Constitutional issues	1.0
Other answers (O/A) + nothing in particular (NIP) + no answer (N/A)	21.1

Q: The Koizumi cabinet has written off bad loans and advanced deregulation. Do you think the Japanese economy is changing for the better with these structural reforms?

Yes	15.5
Yes to a certain degree	39.2
No to a certain degree	22.3
No	17.8
N/A	5.3

Q: "As a result of the Koizumi cabinet's deregulation, business corporations are now competing for better services and lower prices, and the people will be better off." Do you agree to this opinion?

Yes	13.2
Yes to a certain degree	27.8
No to a certain degree	27.2
No	26.9
N/A	5.0

Q: "As a result of the Koizumi cabinet's deregulation, the nation's social divide is widening." Do you agree to this opinion?

Yes	33.6
Yes to a certain degree	25.4
No to a certain degree	20.1
No	14.9
N/A	6.0

Q: (Only for those who answered "yes") What do you think is that? Pick as many as you like from among those listed below.

Disparity in income, assets	61.2
Intergenerational disparity in social security, including pensions	46.5
Disparity between big and small businesses	45.1
Disparity between full- and part-time wages	37.9
Disparity between urban and local districts	37.9
Disparity between those who can receive higher education and those who cannot	19.7
Disparity in opportunities to turn on individual skills at work	9.4
Disparity in opportunities to try again after failing	8.1
O/A+N/A	1.0

Q: Some say recent scandals-such as an architect's falsification of earthquake resistance data on buildings and Livedoor Co.'s illegal trading in securities-have something to do with the reported deterioration of corporate ethics and morals. Do you agree to this opinion?

Yes	11.4
Yes to a certain degree	15.0

TOKYO 00002500 003 OF 013

No to a certain degree	20.8
No	49.3
N/A	3.6

Q: What's your overall rating for the Koizumi cabinet's structural reforms on the whole?

Plus	16.6
Plus to a certain extent	43.7
Minus to a certain extent	20.2
Minus	9.7
N/A	9.8

Q: What's your rating for the Koizumi cabinet's policy measures at home over the past five years?

Appreciate very much	14.1
Appreciate somewhat	52.8
Don't appreciate very much	21.9
Don't appreciate at all	8.0
N/A	3.2

Q: Do you think Japan-US relations have improved over the past five years, or do you otherwise think Japan-US relations have worsened?

Improved	19.0
Improved to a certain extent	43.9
Worsened to a certain extent	17.4
Worsened	4.9
N/A	14.8

Q: What's your rating for the Koizumi cabinet's deployment of Self-Defense Forces members to Iraq for humanitarian reconstruction assistance?

Appreciate very much	13.5
Appreciate somewhat	37.8
Don't appreciate very much	26.7
Don't appreciate at all	18.4
N/A	3.6

Q: (Only for those who answered "appreciate") Why? Pick as many reasons as you like from among those listed below.

Because SDF activities are appreciated by Iraqi people	20.7
Because SDF activities are limited to humanitarian reconstruction only	50.4
Because Japan could play its role to a certain extent in the international community	60.1
Because Japan could strengthen its alliance with the US	15.0

O/A	1.0
N/A	1.4

Q: (Only for those who answered "don't appreciate") Why? Pick as many reasons as you like from among those listed below.

Because SDF activities are not appreciated by Iraqi people	25.4
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Because SDF members may be involved in a battle	42.8
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TOKYO 00002500 004 OF 013

Because I'm against the SDF's overseas dispatch	32.6
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Because Prime Minister Koizumi is at America's beck and call	59.1
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O/A	2.4
N/A	0.6

Q: What's your rating for Prime Minister Koizumi's two visits to North Korea in September 2002 and May 2004 and his meetings with Kim Jong Il?

Appreciate very much	37.5
Appreciate somewhat	43.4
Don't appreciate very much	11.5
Don't appreciate at all	5.2
N/A	2.5

Q: What do you think should be addressed on a priority basis over North Korea issues? Pick as many as you like from among those listed below.

Stop North Korea from developing nuclear weapons	61.6
Stop North Korea from developing missiles	44.7
Resolve the problem of Japanese abductees	81.7
Normalize diplomatic relations	21.7
Extend economic cooperation to North Korea	5.3
Impose economic sanctions on North Korea	26.3
Urge North Korea to change its political and economic systems	16.0
O/A+NIP	1.4
N/A	0.9

Q: Prime Minister Koizumi pledged to visit Yasukuni Shrine when he ran in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's presidential election in 2001, and he has annually visited there. Are you in favor of his visit to the shrine?

Yes	28.2
Yes to a certain degree	25.9
No to a certain degree	19.3
No	20.6
N/A	6.0

Q: Against the backdrop of China's denunciation of Prime Minister Koizumi's visits to Yasukuni Shrine, the leaders of Japan and China have made no mutual visits since October 2001. What do you think about the present state of Japan-China relations?

Very serious	52.9
Somewhat serious	39.3
Not very serious	19.7
Not serious at all	5.3
N/A	2.9

Q: Do you think Prime Minister Koizumi is to blame for the present state of Japan-China relations?

Very much	21.4
Somewhat	39.3
Not very much	21.6
Not at all	14.1
N/A	3.6

Q: What's your rating for the Koizumi cabinet's diplomacy over the past five years?

Appreciate very much	11.6
Appreciate somewhat	47.1
Don't appreciate very much	27.5
Don't appreciate at all	10.1
N/A	3.7

Q: Do you think Japanese politics has changed for the better over the past five years, or do you otherwise think it has changed for the worse?

Better	12.5
Better to a certain degree	43.1
Worse to a certain degree	24.4
Worse	7.9
N/A	12.2

Q: (Only for those who answered "better") Why? Pick as many reasons as you like from among those listed below.

Because politicians are leading bureaucrats	19.2
Because the prime minister is displaying leadership	48.0
Because specific government offices and lawmakers close to specific industries are now less influential than before	28.4
Because LDP factions are less influential now	31.9
Because closed-door politics is gone and politics is now more transparent	23.2
Because the Koizumi cabinet has addressed issues foregone by its predecessors	27.9
Because public opinion is now easily reflected in politics	17.0
Because there was a generational change in lawmakers	18.9
O/A+N/A	3.2

Q: Do you think Prime Minister Koizumi could change the LDP's political approach and nature?

Yes	19.6
Yes to a certain degree	42.3
No to a certain degree	18.8
No	14.9
N/A	4.5

Q: Prime Minister Koizumi called reform opponents in the LDP and relevant organizations "antireformers" and fielded candidates called "assassins" in last year's election for the House of Representatives to square off with them. Do you think such a way of doing things was appropriate?

Yes	15.2
Yes to a certain degree	23.3
No to a certain degree	28.9
No	26.2
N/A	6.5

Q: What's your rating for Prime Minister Koizumi's political approach and remarks over the past five years?

Appreciate very much	13.1
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Appreciate somewhat	49.4
Don't appreciate very much	23.9
Don't appreciate at all	9.2
N/A	4.4

Q: What do you think has made the Koizumi cabinet keep its support rate higher than those for its predecessors? Pick only one primary reason from among those listed below.

Prime Minister Koizumi has been displaying leadership	27.2
Prime Minister Koizumi's restructuring initiatives have been supported	12.9
His cabinet's policy measures have made actual showings, such as visible signs indicating economic recovery	11.4
Prime Minister Koizumi's appearances and hobbies give favorable impressions	10.8
Prime Minister Koizumi is free from scandals over money or women	7.9
His cabinet is a coalition of the LDP and the New Komeito party	5.8
The prime minister is from the LDP	5.3
Prime Minister Koizumi cross words with foreign leaders as equals on international occasions	3.7
Prime Minister Koizumi has visited Yasukuni Shrine	1.1

Q: How many hours on average do you watch television per weekday?

Less than 30 minutes	4.0
30 minutes-1 hour	12.1
1-2 hours	27.0
2-3 hours	29.1
Over 3 hours	26.7
Don't watch TV	0.9
N/A	0.2

Polling methodology

Date of survey: April 8-9.

Subjects of survey: 3,000 persons chosen from among all eligible voters throughout the country (at 250 locations on a stratified two-stage random-sampling basis).

Method of implementation: Door-to-door visits for face-to-face interviews.

Number of valid respondents: 1,823 persons (60.8%)

Breakdown of respondents: Male-48%, female-52%; persons in their 20s-10%, 30s-16%, 40s-17%, 50s-21%, 60s-21%, 70 and over-15%; big cities (Tokyo's 23 wards and government-designated cities)-21%, major cities (with a population of more than 300,000)-19%, medium-size cities (with a population of more than 100,000)-24%, small cities (with a population of less than 100,000)-22%, towns and villages-14%.

(2) Prime Minister Koizumi giving serious consideration to paying homage at Yasukuni Shrine on Aug. 15, the day of the anniversary of the end of WWII; If he visits, relations with China and ROK will surely go from bad to worse

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 2) (Full)
May 8, 2006

06

Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi has begun to examine what specific impact would result if he should visit Yasukuni Shrine

TOKYO 00002500 007 OF 013

on Aug. 15, the day of the anniversary of the end of World War II (WWII), according to one of his aides. "The prime minister has a strong desire to pay homage at Yasukuni Shrine this year on the anniversary of WW II, for this is his last year in office," the same source said. Koizumi is likely to make a decision on the timing of a shrine visit after considering from various angles how China and South Korea might react, as well as the likely fallout on the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) presidential race set for September.

LDP lawmaker Taku Yamasaki has speculated that the "most likely date for the prime minister to visit Yasukuni Shrine would be Aug. 15." The possibility that Koizumi is seriously considering visiting the shrine on that day is certain to pour more icy water over relations with China and South Korea.

During his LDP presidential campaign in 2001, Koizumi pledged, "I will pay homage at the shrine on the anniversary of the end of the war." But that year, he visited the shrine on Aug. 13,

moving up the timing by two days. Since then he either went on New Year's day or on the shrine's spring or autumn festivals. The same source said, "The prime minister regretted moving up the date in 2001."

Recently Koizumi has avoided mentioning a specific date for a shrine visit, only stating, "I will make a proper decision" on when to visit the shrine.

(3) Interview with US Consul General for Okinawa Thomas Reich on effect of US force realignment on Okinawa: Number of US Marines unclear; Six bases will be returned in stages

OKINAWA TIMES (Page 2) (Full)
May 9, 2006

In the wake of the production of the final report on the realignment of US forces in Japan, the Okinawa Times asked US Consul General for Okinawa Thomas Reich about its impact on Okinawa and other factors.

Okinawa Times: At present, there are about 12,000 US Marines in Okinawa. Of them, 8,000 will be relocated, leaving 4,000 in Okinawa. Is that correct?

Reich: Some 9,000 family members will also be relocated. I cannot say exactly how many US Marines will remain in Okinawa. The number of US troops in Okinawa changes all the time as they are constantly on the move, making it difficult to grasp the correct number.

Okinawa Times: What can you tell us about the return of the six bases south of Kadena Air Base and the integration of bases?

Reich: Things will be determined specifically by next March, and realignment and consolidation will progress. If the six facilities have any functions that must absolutely stay here, they must be relocated elsewhere in the prefecture. Nothing has been determined about their relocations.

Okinawa Times: When are you going to return the six bases?

Reich: We are hoping to return them by 2014. They will bring tremendous changes to Okinawa in the next eight years. The six

TOKYO 00002500 008 OF 013

bases will be returned in stages rather than at once.

Okinawa Times: Is the package argument still valid even if the Futenma relocation is delayed and only the facilities in Guam are completed?

Reich: The United States and Japan basically want to realize the two projects as a package. Many Okinawa residents are supportive of the relocation, and we believe that the Japanese government will realize it. There won't be any obstacles to the package approach.

Okinawa Times: What kind of aircraft is the United States going to deploy at the alternative facility for Futenma? Is there any possibility of using aerial refueling planes and deploying Ospreys?

Reich: The road map (in the final report) doesn't specify any models. No aerial refueling planes are stationed in Okinawa. I don't know if they will use the new facility. It is a fact that the United States is planning to replace CH-53s with Ospreys in the future. There has been no formal announcement on when they will be deployed to Okinawa.

Okinawa Times: With the two-runway plan, will US aircraft be able to avoid flying over residential areas? Will they conduct touch-and-go drills?

Reich: The two runways in a V shape will be different from the one at Futenma Air Station, and I don't know if they will conduct

touch-and-go drills. The United States and Japan have been studying specific flight paths at the working level. All I can say is that we will respect the wishes of Okinawa residents.

Okinawa Times: Will helicopters continue their drills at Futenma until the alternative facility is completed?

Reich: They will continue using Futenma Air Station until the new facility is constructed. Splitting Futenma functions among multiple locations before the completion of the alternative facility is inconceivable.

Okinawa Times: What's your take on Okinawa's temporary heliport plan?

Reich: I am aware through media reports that Gov. Keiichi Inamine made such a proposal, which is different from the plan agreed upon by the governments of the United States and Japan. Basically I don't think there is any big difference from the agreed plan.

Okinawa Times: Are the bases besides Camp Hansen and Kadena Air Base also going to expand the range of joint use with the Self-Defense Forces?

Reich: I don't want to say 'no' to that question. We cannot rule out expansion. But at present, Kadena and Hansen are the only ones subject to expansion.

Okinawa Times: If joint use with the SDF can help maintain deterrence, there won't be any need in the future to station US Marines in Okinawa, will there?

Reich: It's an awfully interesting question. We'll get the answer

TOKYO 00002500 009 OF 013

in the future. I think it's good for the SDF to work jointly with the US military in terms of enhancing deterrence. It's also conceivable for the Ground Self-Defense Force to replace US Marines. I think this is possible in the future.

(Interviewed by Tsuyoshi Watanabe of the political news department)

(4) ASDF realignment plan; Air Defense Command's Headquarters to be strengthened; Control over MD system; 24-hour-a-day watch

SANKEI (Page 1) (Slightly abridged)
May 8, 2006

The Defense Agency (JDA) has been looking into a plan to realign the Air Self-Defense Force (ASDF). The entire details of the plan were unveiled yesterday. The showcase of the package is to substantially reinforce the command-and-control capability of the Air Defense Command's Headquarters (ADCH), which is to be operated jointly with the US Air Force at US Yokota Air Base in Tokyo, after USFJ realignment. The ADCH will also ensure that a missile defense system to be operated jointly by Japan and the US function effectively. With the integration of the ASDF's command-and-control system into the ADCH in mind, four Air Defense Forces and Composite Air Divisions deployed throughout the nation will also be either integrated or abolished.

According to the plan incorporated in the final report, the ADCH, located in Fuchu, Tokyo, will be relocated to Yokota Air Base in 2010 to be integrated into a new joint operations coordination center along with the US 5th Air Force Headquarters. The new organization will serve as a key vehicle to maintain deterrence, allowing the two countries to share intelligence on air defense and the missile defense system designed to intercept ballistic missiles.

The ADCH will also command the Self-Defense Forces' joint task forces. It will collect radar information from the SDF and the US military and operate the ASDF's ground-to-air missiles and Patriot missiles (PAC3) and standard missiles loaded on the Maritime Self-Defense Force's Aegis ships jointly.

Though there is a potential danger of North Korea launching a ballistic missile without warning, the ADCH is currently not on 24-hour-a-day alert. For this reason, the 200-strong ADCH will be substantively expanded so as to shift to a 24-hour-a-day alert system.

The integration or abolition of four Air Defense Forces and Composite Air Divisions is also part of the move to strengthen the functions of the ADCH. There are two plans: one is to integrate them into two forces, by drawing a demarcation line in the center of the archipelago or leaving three forces, by eliminating the borderline between Kyushu and Okinawa. This means a shift to a central control of operations by the ADCH, by reducing "vertically divided" operations based on the present defense force division system, as a senior JDA official put it. Chinese aircraft are actively flying over oil and gas fields in the East China Sea, increasing concern about a possible invasion of an isolated island there. The new system will enable to concentrate fighting strength in this region.

The 5th Air Force Headquarters controls US combat troops at

TOKYO 00002500 010 OF 013

Misawa, Aomori Prefecture and Kadena, Okinawa Prefecture. The same senior JDA official noted, "Yokota Air Base can serve as a center for bilateral air operations only after the ADCH comes under the unified command system." The ASDF's organizational change can be characterized as the first step in the JSDF's transformation in the run-up to joint operations between Japan and the US.

(5) Kakushin (Heart of matter) column by Yasuhiro Tase: Since Japan appears to have forgotten its diplomatic strategy toward neighboring nations, how then will it live in Asia?

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 5) (Almost full)
May 8, 2006

By Yasuhiro Tase, guest columnist, who is now professor at the Graduate School of Waseda University

Imagine a schoolboy who does well at school but has no friends. During the lunch hour, the boy hangs from an exercise bar alone to kill time in a corner of the schoolyard. He murmurs there is nothing wrong with him and that his classmates are the ones who are to blame because they are unwilling to play with him.

Japan appears isolated internationally, or rather I should say the government of Japan seems isolated from Asia. This isolation is viewed as an honorable status by Japanese nationalists, whose numbers are on the rise. My deep concern at present is that although many people recognize that Japan has become isolated, they assume a so-what attitude about it. Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi has insisted: "As long as the Japan-US alliance is firm and solid, Japan can get along with China and South Korea." But even the Japan-US alliance itself is somewhat shaky now. The summit relationship between President Bush and Prime Minister Koizumi remains in good shape, but when it comes to specific issues, for instance, the realignment of US forces in Japan, tangible discrepancies exist between the two nations.

The Bush administration's initial hope was to see Japan become a leader to which the United States could entrust everything involving the Far East. If Japan were to play such a role, the US could focus its energies on the Middle East and other critical regions. But Japan has become a troublemaker instead of a troubleshooter. The Koizumi administration at first was not as stubborn or rigid (in its diplomacy) as it is now. In fact, it even set up a Foreign Relations Task Force as an advisory panel to the prime minister.

The nine members of the task force, who included international relations expert Yukio Okamoto, delivered a report titled, "Basic Strategies for Japan's Foreign Policy in the 21st Century" in November 2002, in which they concluded, "For the future of

Japanese diplomacy, Japan needs to lay out a clear national strategy, which Japan has lacked in the past." The panel suggested setting up a strategic council on foreign affairs as an advisory panel to offer foreign policy guidelines to the prime minister. But such a council has not been established to date, and the suggestion in the report has been forgotten entirely. There was also another earlier proposal that likewise sank into oblivion. It was "Japan's Goals in the 21st Century," written and submitted by the Commission on Japan's Goals in the 21st Century, chaired by Hayao Kawai (professor emeritus at Kyoto University) to Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi. The report had a section titled,

TOKYO 00002500 011 OF 013

"Japan's Place in the World," which contained words that Japan today seems to need most. The suggestion about relations with China and South Korea in the report is worth repeating:

"Japan's relationships with South Korea and China are not so simple as to be just called diplomatic relations. Relations with these two countries should run deeper than mere diplomatic ties, yet they have yet to be developed with much depth. Japan needs to build a profound relationship with these two countries, since diplomatic efforts alone will not save the day, the issues being difficult to grasp. We call this sort of management of relations as 'good neighbor diplomacy.'"

The height of diplomacy lies in having a moral supremacy: In other words, having a diplomacy and way of carrying it out that make other countries think that this country and its people are splendid beyond compare, Japan's diplomacy is at the opposite end of the spectrum. Japan says arrogantly that it is not to blame, but that the fault lies on the other side. What is bad is Japan's own domestic political strategy that ends up making Japan the bad guy.

There is an argument that even if the prime minister stops visiting Yasukuni Shrine, relations with China and South Korea would not recover so quickly. That could be true. Some argue that Japan then would still face one difficult issue after another from the other side instead of Yasukuni. This, too, may well be true. However, nothing will be resolved if we continue to do nothing. Instead, distrust of Japan will spread across other Asian countries that are not much interested in the history and Yasukuni issues. After the end of the Cold War, the international order dramatically changed. What kind of country does Japan want to become? Who will guide Japan in its foreign policy and for what purposes? Japan lacks this sort of strategy. As a result, I have a sense of apprehension that Japan always decides its course expediently and without debate. Because of a lack of diplomatic strategy, Japan cannot send a good message to the rest of the world.

A country that lacks such a strategy can never win the respect of other countries. Many in Japan agree that Japan's diplomacy is at an impasse, but politicians, regardless of whether they are members of the ruling or opposition parties, lack a sense of crisis. Needless to say, the general public, too, has little sense of crisis, as evidenced by the last Lower House election, in which diplomacy was not even a campaign issue. We must not allow the present abnormal situation to continue in which no summit talks with neighboring nations have been held due to (Yasukuni) an "issue of the heart."

In order to solidify the Japan-US alliance, I think the first matter at hand is for Japan to have good relations with the countries in the East Asian region. How Japan will live in Asia is not a trifling issue at all, and it should not be simply made into one of the campaign issues for the presidential race of the Liberal Democratic Party this fall. It is a grand theme to determine the course of Japan over the next century.

(6) In voting conducted by civic group on Constitution, many youths in Shibuya support Article 9

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Top Play) (Full)
May 4, 2006

Are you supportive of or opposed to a revision of Article 9 of the Constitution? Members of a civic group yesterday asked the above questions to young persons walking in streets in Shibuya, Tokyo, and other locations. The respondents picked a "yes" or "no" seal and put it on a board. Although most youngsters usually show little interest in politics, the survey found an overwhelming majority of respondents opposed to a revision of Article 9. Many voiced concern about politicians' recent active moves to amend the Constitution.

70% oppose revision

Civic group members conducted the voting in a square in front of JR Shibuya Station, catching persons walking.

A female part-timer, 20, chose the "opposition" seal without a moment's hesitation, saying: "Will this nation engage in warfare? In such a case, powerless persons will suffer most."

A male student in the third year of high school in Tokyo, 17, picked the "opposition" seal and said: "It is outrageous for Japan to revise Article 9 and have a Self-Defense Force. Is our nation going to make the same mistake as it did in the past? It is us in the young generation who will be sent to battlefields."

A music academy student, 19, from Nishi-Tokyo City chose the "support" seal, saying: "North Korea could attack Japan. It is necessary for Japan to build up its defense capability." A female college student, 20, in Tokyo also said: "If the Constitution is revised, the current stagnant situation may be changed."

A male company employee, 20, from Chigasaki City, Kanagawa Prefecture, said: "Politicians are not interested in young persons. They never ask for our views. It is desirable for us to express our views in this kind of voting."

In about two hours of the voting in Shibuya, 72 persons voted for and 258 voted against the proposed revision of Article 9, with 39 respondents replying: "I don't know."

In conducting this survey, Okayama University Professor Emeritus Ryuzaburo Noda and others set up a secretariat and appealed for volunteers on the Internet to help the voting in 33 prefectures for three days from April 29. The total number of votes was about 28,000. Of them, about 12% or about 3,300 voted for the revision of Article 9, while about 77% or about 21,600 voted against it. The remaining respondents replied: "I don't know."

The results of the survey will be mailed to Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, the House of Representatives speaker, and the House of Councillors president.

(7) Strategic distribution of ODA funds; Overseas Economic Cooperation Council holds first meeting; Consideration also to be given to environment area

YOMIURI (Page 4) (Full)
May 9, 2006

The government yesterday held the first meeting of the Overseas Economic Cooperation Council (chaired by Prime Minister Koizumi) at the Prime Minister's Official Residence (Kantei) with the aim

of strategically implementing official development assistance (ODA). It was agreed at the meeting that the propriety of extending ODA to major recipient countries and key project items should be discussed on a priority basis. The meeting brought together the prime minister, Chief Cabinet Secretary Abe, Foreign Minister Aso, Finance Minister Tanigaki and Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Nikai. They agreed to look into the propriety

of ODA with focus on not only recipient countries but also individual sectors, such as the environment and energy.

During the meeting, the prime minister said, "The public is skeptical about whether ODA funds are being used efficiently or whether they are provided in such a way as to meet national interests. Since ODA is funded with tax money, it should be implemented efficiently and strategically so that it contributes to national interests. Regarding foreign visits by senior vice ministers and state secretaries of various government agencies, the prime minister noted, "I want them to pay attention to small countries so that their visits will not concentrate on specific countries or areas." It has been decided that Abe would be in charge of coordinating visits by officials from those countries.

The panel was newly established in response to a proposal made by the Study Group on Overseas Economic Cooperation (chaired by former Public Prosecutor General Akio Harada), a private panel reporting to Abe. The objective of the panel is to enhance the efficiency of ODA, by reforming the current system, under which government agencies independently extend ODA. Another aim is to strategically distribute ODA funds under the initiative of Kantei or cabinet ministers.

Commenting on the role of the panel, Abe told a news conference: "We have lacked a viewpoint of considering ODA from a perspective of the environment and energy. We will now consider destinations of ODA from that perspective. We will hold free discussions, by setting a theme each time. In that process, we want to map out a strategic target and strategy itself."

SCHIEFFER